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ON PAGE A-3

NEW YORK TIMES
7 September 1984

U.S. Army Officers Helped Private Group in Salvador

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 6 — A number of United States military officers in El Salvador became actively involved during the last year in helping a group of private Americans donate military equipment to the Salvadoran armed forces, according to Defense Department documents.

The involvement, more extensive than previously reported, included introducing the leader of the private group to the general staff of the Salvadoran Army, encouraging the Americans to send equipment, delivering the matériel to the Salvadoran Army and acting, in general, as a channel between the Americans and the Salvadorans.

According to the documents and Administration officials, much of the liaison work was handled by Maj. Charles A. McAnarey, the chief United States logistics officer in El Salvador.

A spokesman for the United States Embassy in El Salvador, Donald R. Hamilton, while confirming that American military officers had assisted the private group, said today that there "was nothing inappropriate or unethical about their conduct."

'A Friendly Act'

He added: "The private Americans were doing a friendly act for a friendly government and there's nothing wrong with American officials helping them get in contact with the Salvadoran Government. We help all kinds of people make all kinds of contacts."

Federal law and Defense Department policy prohibit American military officers from acting in any capacity as an agent for a private organization or corporation. But Mr. Hamilton said that Major McAnarey's efforts to assist the American group were not barred by law or policy.

A number of current and former American ambassadors said that United States military officers stationed in embassies were usually discouraged from helping private groups sell, donate or transfer military equipment to foreign governments. The ambassadors said this was to avoid getting the officers, and by extension the United States, entangled in private arms deals that might be illegal or be contrary to American interests.

Two members of the private, anti-Communist group involved in El Salvador were killed last week when their helicopter was shot down in Nicaragua. The group, known as Civilian Military

Assistance, is composed primarily of Vietnam veterans from Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi. It has given advice and military equipment to Nicaraguan rebels as well as the Salvadoran armed forces, according to its leaders.

C.I.A. Agents, Nicaragua Says

The Reagan Administration has denied that the group's support of the rebels was in any way connected with the Central Intelligence Agency's aid to the insurgents. Nicaragua has charged that the two Americans who were killed were C.I.A. agents and that the Administration has turned to private groups to help the rebels as official aid has diminished in recent months because of Congressional opposition.

Democrats in Congress called today for an investigation into the role of Civilian Military Assistance in Nicaragua. Senator Patrick J. Leahy, the Vermont Democrat who is a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said he would ask the panel to look into whether the helicopter that was shot down on Saturday took off from Honduran airfields built or controlled by the United States.

Mr. Leahy said that if Americans were being allowed to launch combat operations into Nicaragua from airfields at Jamastrán or Aquacate the action would be contrary to assurances given to Congress.

The involvement of the United States Military Advisory Group in El Salvador with Civilian Military Assistance began last October when the leader of the private organization, Thomas V. Posey of Decatur, Ala., visited El Salvador, according to the Pentagon documents.

Officers Arranged Meeting

The documents, which include copies of letters sent to Mr. Posey by Major McAnarey after the October visit, show that American military officers arranged a meeting for Mr. Posey with the Chief of Staff of the Salvadoran Army, Col. Mario Reyes Mena, and other Salvadoran officers.

In a letter dated Nov. 11, after Mr. Posey had returned to Alabama, Major McAnarey said that the offer of military equipment "was not frivolously considered" by the Salvadoran general staff. The letter added that the Military Advisory Group had prepared a letter for Mr. Posey to submit to the Salvadoran military listing the items his group was prepared to donate. Mr. Hamilton said an aide to Major McAnarey had translated the letter, originally drafted by Mr. Posey, into Spanish.

On Jan. 24, Major McAnarey wrote again to Mr. Posey. The letter notified Mr. Posey that the military equipment, donated by Civilian Military Assistance had arrived in El Salvador and was "greatly appreciated by the El Salvador Army."

Any further contributions, also, would be appreciated," the letter continued.

Major McAnarey also wrote that he was prohibited by law and embassy policy from acting as an agent for Mr. Posey or his group.

Mr. Hamilton said that Civilian Military Assistance had sent about a dozen boxes of military equipment to Major McAnarey.

"We will present our position on the aggressive policies of the American Government before the Security Council," said Carlos Núñez, a member of the nine-man ruling Sandinista directorate.

A United Nations spokesman in New York said the Security Council would meet Friday in response to a request submitted Wednesday by the Nicaraguan chargé d'affaires, Julio Icaza Gallard.